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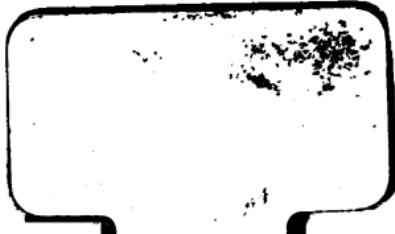
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MARY BEAVER  
OR THE  
HOUSEMAID'S WEDDING



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MARY BEAVER:

OR,



THE HOUSEMAID'S WEDDING.

BY THE LATE J. W.

"She being dead, yet speaketh."

LONDON,  
JOHN HENRY PARKER;  
HENRY B. RECKITT, WIGAN.  
MDCCCLV.



## MARY BEAVER.

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"Well, Mary, what does Missus say?" said the Cook to a nice smart looking maid, who had just come from the parlour, and whose countenance betrayed a blushing interest in what had just taken place.

"Why," she replied, "she says I am old enough to judge for myself, but she fears William is not so good a man as she could wish; but that you know, Mrs. Jones, is only because she don't know him; if she did, I am sure she would never say so."

"Well, if he'll only keep sober," returned Mrs. Jones, "he'll do well enough, I make no doubt; he's clever and sharp enough, that's certain."

Mary Beaver was, as I have said, a nice smart looking active good natured girl; and, more than that, she had been brought up by religious parents, and taught quiet, sober, industrious, cleanly habits. She was a good servant, and had been six years with her Mistress, who was both fond and proud of her, as it was the only place Mary

had ever been in, and Mrs. Banks had taught her all she knew of household work.

Mary had long been courted by William Fairley, a fine, handsome, spirited, clever young man; who could turn his hand to most things, and who was quick and successful in his trade, a joiner. Now there were few young women who would not have been proud to have William Fairley for a lover, and Mary was envied by many ; but her love and admiration for his many brilliant qualities made her either blind or careless about seeing, what is of far greater consequence, his religious principles. Alas ! William, though brought up with great care and pains, and many prayers, by his father and mother, had wasted his opportunities, and paid little attention to his instruction. Not that he was a bad boy, but he was too high spirited to be an humble learner, and too full of play and fun to be serious on serious subjects. In fact he was like many others, and unable to enter steadily into any subject, but the present passing scene. Notwithstanding all this he was amiable and good-tempered, and much beloved by his companions, who made sadly too much of him, for his own good.

You might guess from all this that poor William was not in a very likely state to resist

temptation, if any should come in his way. He was too ready to follow his first impulse, and had no strong principle to stand against temptation. True, his impulses, hitherto, had chiefly been good ones, and his real, steady love for Mary Beaver seemed likely to keep them so, but no one is permitted to pass through this scene of trial, without either "fighting the good fight," or becoming bound, a prisoner and slave, to Sin. It behoves us all, therefore, to be on our guard, for an attack in the shape of temptation may come any time when we least expect it, and victory be lost for want of watching. Every victory we gain strengthens us for the next conflict, and every loss weakens and disheartens us. Good-nature is a very loveable and pleasant thing in general, yet it may lead those of easy dispositions into sin, and this with poor William Fairley had lately been the case. He was fond of society, and could sing several good songs, so that he had once or twice lately been tempted to join a few of his friends at the public house, just for a chat; but of course when he was there, he could not well refuse a glass of ale when it was offered him, and grievous to say, that glass had lately, more than once, been followed by several more, and William had staggered home a disgrace to himself

and his family. It was this that Mrs. Jones alluded to, when she answered Mary, and though she said it rather roughly, and hurt poor Mary's feelings, yet in the main she was a kind hearted woman, and would have done a good deal to save poor Mary pain; for they had been fellow-servants ever since Mary came. Mary had been a good deal startled on hearing that William had been tipsy two or three times, and she spoke to him about it, and told him she never would marry him, if he frequented the Bush Inn; and William, when he saw her distress, promised not to do so, and kept his word for the present; but he had made the promise in his own strength alone, and, if he himself could have known how very short a time would see all his promises broken through, he would indeed have been greatly shocked. He would have been ready to exclaim with Hazaël, "am I a dog that I should do this great thing?"

Mary's interview with her Mistress had been to ask her consent to their speedy marriage, which Mrs. Banks rather reluctantly gave; for, though she knew of their engagement, and feared it would come to that at last, she was far too well learned in the World's ways, not to fear *very* much for Mary's happiness. She told her therefore, all she thought of William Fairley, and

warned Mary of what she must expect, unless it should please Almighty God to convince William, before too late, of the very great danger he was in, of becoming a confirmed drunkard.

"And, you know, Mary," she said, "there is no comfort, or hope, for the wife and family of a drunkard—all you might be able to do to keep things together would be of no use, if your husband once got that fearful appetite, an appetite which allows a man to *starve* his wife and children, to strip his cottage of furniture, to neglect his business, and even to rob his own wife of her very clothes, in order to gratify it. Think over this, Mary, and pray earnestly that you may be led to make a wise choice, and then, trusting to a wiser Guide than any earth can give, I hope you will choose for your temporal as well as eternal good. You are quite old enough to judge for yourself, and you alone can do so, only take time and consider well. It is, you know, a step which cannot be retraced; once taken, it is taken for ever."

Poor Mary was much impressed; but she was deeply in love with William, and thought her mistress harsh; she was sure *she* did not know him, and she forgot how few young men had never been tipsy. Surely it was not a great crime

to have taken a little too much just once or twice, when he forgot himself, and, besides, had he not promised her never to do it again, and did he not seem quite as sorry as she was? Oh! she felt quite sure her mistress was wrong this time, though to be sure, she could not help remembering she was generally right. Well she would take her advice, and pray with all her heart to know what she ought to do, and then she would make up her mind. But, Mary! is not your mind made up already? alas! the poor girl did not know it, but she was at that very moment firmly resolved to marry William Fairley, come what might. And then came the preparations for the wedding, and she had to go with William to see about a cottage, and then to buy a nice, neat, lilac, cotton dress, and a white ribbon for her wedding bonnet, and gown, and then to help to provide the breakfast, for Mrs. Banks gave her her wedding breakfast, and desired she might be married from the house as she had no other home. All these things put thought pretty well out of Mary's head, I mean profitable thought, for her mind was full enough of love, and weddings, and ribbons, and smart caps; besides tables, and chairs, and other furniture for the cottage, for William had furnished her new home very comfortably.

At length the day arrived when she was to give herself, her strength, her will, her time, and all that she possessed, except her soul, to her husband—yes, it is a solemn thing,—marriage,—and yet, I fear many girls go to Church and are married without once thinking about it. Do they ever read over the solemn service, in which they are going to take so prominent a part? If they did, surely we should not see both parties smiling and joking, and one sometimes even intoxicated, as we often do now. But Mary had read the marriage service, because her mistress had entreated her to do so, and it almost frightened her from her purpose. She only read it the day before the wedding, and then she begged William to do the same. She read that she was about to make solemn promise to *obey*, serve, love, honour, and keep William until death; now, she said to herself, if he drinks, can I obey him, or honour him, or, indeed love him? Oh yes, I must always do that; but I can never believe he will drink again, and when I am his wife, I will make his home so comfortable, and be always so kind to him, that he will not wish to leave it. Besides he will promise to love me always too, and, if he does, he never will make me unhappy by drinking. Oh no! I will not

think of it. Then she thought how she would always try to fulfil the great promise she was going to make, and she prayed earnestly for strength to do so, and for God's blessing upon them both, that He might indeed "sow the seed of eternal life in their hearts," as one of the prayers say, and so that they might help each other through this world's trials, and meet at last in Heaven. She determined she would read over the exhortation to wives about their duty to their husbands, at the end of the service, very often, and particularly, if she felt cross or fretful. These thoughts and prayers made Mary very quiet and thoughtful, the evening before her wedding, and caused her some jokes and laughter from her fellow-servants; but Mary was too much impressed to care for that, and was glad to get to her own room, where she could be quiet.

The sun was shining brightly the next morning when Mary awoke, after sleeping very soundly, with a weight of something upon her mind, at first indistinct, but presently plain enough. This was her wedding day! was she good enough for a wife? Was she going to promise what she should not have strength to perform? William did not know how weak, and thoughtless, and unworthy, she sometimes was. What should she do? where

should she turn for help? Mary knew where, for she had been well taught, and there she did turn, with many tears and earnest prayers; and she rose from her knees calm and comforted. But what was William doing? His mind had never been accustomed to reflect—his cares and troubles had never been carried to the Help of the weak and heavy laden. True he *said* his prayers most nights and mornings; but alas! it was usually without thought or attention. He, then, had never thought of asking God's help to perform the duties he was about so thoughtlessly to take upon himself. His mind was full of his wedding, his pretty bride, the prettiest girl in those parts, his comfortable home, his independence; now he was to be his own master, and leave his poor old father and mother. He was in high spirits, and laughing loud with some of his companions, who were to accompany him to his wedding.

Poor Mary, pale, and trembling, met him, and his gay party at the Church, and the service was gone through, with great feeling, by the Rector, who had examined Mary for Confirmation, and to whom she had been accustomed to go in case of any difficulty. After the service, Mr. Grant, the Rector, wished them both health

and happiness, and gave them some good advice, winding up by saying, how glad he should be to be a help to either of them, and how much he hoped they would continue regular Church-goers, and Mary remain a constant Communicant. Then, looking to William, he expressed a hope that he too would turn his thoughts to that subject, and become one of the happy few who meet regularly round the Table of the Lord. Oh! Sir, said Mary, I hope you will often call in, when William is at home, and explain those things to him, for I think, that is the only thing wanting to make me completely happy.

The breakfast and wedding gaieties all went off well, and Mary and William were comfortably and quietly settled, man and wife, in their own house. Here time passed pleasantly enough with Mary; William was kinder than even she expected, and always praised the dinner or supper she had prepared for him, and admired the bright fire-place, and the nice clean cottage. He was very regular at his meals, and never out late at night, and Mary began to think she had suffered a great deal of anxiety on his account uselessly. The fair was now coming on at Croston, and William was rather more busy than usual, knocking up temporary standings and

booths, and helping to set an enormous round tent which was to serve as a circus during the fair. It was about this time too that Mary's health was not very good, and her spirits got low with being so much alone, for often she had to sit up for William, and, you may be sure, her thoughts were not very light during those long watchings.

One night he was later than usual, she had sat her candle out, and would not light another, for she was too sleepy to work, and the fire-light was enough. What could keep William? The fair was nearly over, so he could not be joinering; how she did wish he would come! surely he would if he could—could he be at the Bush Inn! a cold heavy weight seemed to press upon her chest at this thought, and her heart almost stopped beating. God forbid! she said aloud. Just then the door was shaken quietly, and a voice, alas! she knew whose voice, though it was so changed, said, "Open the door, can't you? what are you stopping for?" Poor Mary! she crossed the cottage and opened the door, though she felt scarcely able to stand, and in staggered her husband, talking loudly and incoherently, and evidently quite unconscious of what he was about. With a hasty prayer for strength, Mary soothingly asked him to go to bed, for it was late, and,

to her great relief, he consented, and went. Not so Mary ; she sat weeping by the remains of the fire, until morning warned her to rouse herself, and get the breakfast.

All Mrs. Banks had threatened her with seemed coming upon her at once. How should she meet her husband ? what would he say to her, or she to him ? She drew a long sigh, and heard a voice behind her, saying, "What a sigh Mary ! Dont take on so ! I know I did wrong last night, but I could not well help it, for I met an old friend in the fair, and could not refuse to have a little talk with him in the Bush before he went home." "Then you were at the Bush," said Mary, "oh ! William." William knew his promise, and had not forgotten it, even when he was in the act of stepping in to the inn ; but he persuaded himself that his promise meant that he would not drink to make himself tipsy there. Mary could never have meant that he should not sit a few minutes there with a friend. Her tone, as she said "Oh William," shewed him the falseness of this reasoning, and, throwing his arms round his wife, he begged her to forgive him, and not to look so unhappy, and, that, indeed, he would try not to vex her again. Poor Mary could only cry and sob, and hope for the

best, but that William, of whom she thought so highly, and who was so superior to herself, should have to beg her pardon ! Oh ! it was a sad trial. She could not help feeling that he had fallen, and was not the William of her own dear love.

Time passed much as usual after this, and William was as steady and kind a husband as wife could wish, except that he sometimes found an excuse for not going to Church with her on a Sunday, but that was not often. And now Mary's duties were increased by the birth of a little boy, a bonny bright babe, just like his father, and as healthy and strong as mother could wish. William was very fond of him, and would always nurse him after supper, whilst Mary put the things away and tidied the cottage. He left off wandering from her on a Sunday too, and went regularly with her to service, so much so, that, when Mr. Grant called, he expressed his pleasure at seeing William so steady.

The baby was now six weeks old, and Mary had been anxious for its baptism for more than a fortnight, but her husband wished to have a half holyday on the day, and his master had hitherto been unable to give him one. Now, however, he told Mary he could have one the next Wednesday, and Mary set busily about preparing

for it. Mrs. Jones was to stand Godmother, and had promised, with her mistress's leave, to stay tea, and two of William's friends were engaged as Godfathers.

All seemed to promise well, and Mary was baking a nice fresh loaf for tea, when, a gentle tap at the door announced a visitor. On looking up, Mary perceived, to her great pleasure, her old mistress, Mrs. Banks, standing at the entrance with a parcel in her hand. She instantly dropped a curtsey, and, saying, "Good morning, ma'am," wiped a chair with her apron, and, placing it near the fire, begged her to be seated.

"How do you do Mary?" said Mrs. Banks, "and how is your baby going on? I have not seen him yet, but Mrs. Jones tells me, he is a fine, healthy, child." "Yes ma'am," said Mary with some pride, "he is, thank God, a beautiful boy, and we hope to take him to be christened to-morrow, which will be a great joy to us all. Please just to look at him, ma'am, as he lies sleeping in his cradle, he is reckoned to favour his father, he's a bonny boy isn't he." "So he is, Mary," said Mrs. Banks, "and I hope you and William will be able, by God's help, to bring him up to be a good man, a comfort to yourselves. You cannot begin better than by having him

made a member of Christ, as you propose doing to-morrow, and I have brought him a little hood and cloak for his christening, which I hope you will like." So saying, she opened the parcel she carried in her hand, and displayed a neat, little, light drab hood, and merino cloak. Mary was in great delight when she saw what a handsome present she was receiving, and scarcely knew how to thank Mrs. Banks. However she did her best, and wanted to take the baby up to shew her how beautiful he would look in his new clothes, but this Mrs. Banks would not allow. What pleasure it was to Mary to try them on when he did awake, and how very lovely she did think he was in them. Then she had the whole story to tell William, and the cloak and hood to shew him, and few people could be happier than Mary was that night.

The day was rather cloudy next morning, but it cleared up nicely towards noon, and Mary had the baby and herself quite ready, all dressed in their best by two o'clock, when Mrs. Jones arrived, also very smart, and admired the baby in its new things, to Mary's satisfaction.—"Well, to be sure," said Mrs. Jones, "I never saw any thing prettier for a baby, no, not even amongst the quality. I wonder wherever Mistress got them,

not in Croston, I promise you ; Oh ! I know now ; she drove to D——— on Monday, and bought them there, I make no doubt—but hadn't we better be starting, Mary ?" " Why, William will be here directly," answered Mary, " and we're like to wait for him and the Godfathers."

William was not long in coming, and a happier party there could scarcely be, when they all set off, Mrs. Jones insisting on carrying the baby, and Mary walking by her, every now and then peeping under the handkerchief, which covered his little fat, round face, to see whether he slept. Mr. Grant was ready for them, and was earnestly joined by Mary and Mrs. Jones in the deeply affecting service which followed. William too could not remain unmoved, and the thought came into his head, that *now* he must be careful and set his son a sober example.

Poor Mary's tears fell fast when she received her precious boy from the hands of the Priest, with his little brow wet with the holy water, and remembered she had now given him to God, to be brought up for His service, and that he was no longer her own, but only lent to her for a season. She pressed one long, long kiss upon his cheek, and then gave him to his Godmother, who almost smothered him with them.

The party were all to return to tea, which Mary had been busy all morning preparing, but just as they were leaving the Church, William whispered to her, "Mary, we'll be with you directly, I'm just going for a minute with Dick Burton, but we shan't be long, so make the tea." Mrs. Jones and Mary had sat talking by the fire for more than an hour, the teapot on the hob had nearly boiled, so long had it stood there; the table was covered with a nice clean cloth and five cups and saucers stood ready for use. The new, nicely risen, loaf, occupied the middle of the table, and some fresh butter and cresses were placed on each side.

Mary's wonders and fears increased every moment, and still William and his friends did not come. She said nothing, except, that they would be there soon; but Mrs. Jones expressed great astonishment many times, and declared it was a shame to keep them so long; for her part, she would begin without them. She said this so often, that, at last, Mary thought it would be best, and they ate their tea.

The evening began to darken, and Mrs. Jones thought she must go. "I am sorry to leave you, Mary," she said, "but Missus is very particular about any one being out late you know, and

I must go, I fear.” “Oh yes,” said Mary, “you’d better go, they’ll not be long now, and I am used to be alone, and don’t mind it. I shall put baby to bed, and get a bit of supper ready for them, and the time will soon pass.”

Mary was very thankful to be alone, and glad to bid Mrs. Jones good night, for she now began to fear the worst, and, of all things, she dreaded Mrs. Jones seeing her husband intoxicated, and telling Mrs. Banks.

After putting baby to bed, and setting the cottage to rights, and preparing the supper table, she took up her Bible, the same that Mr. Grant had given her at her confirmation, and which Mary read every day, if it were only two or three verses. She opened it at her favourite part, “The Sermon on the Mount”—and, with a short prayer between each verse, read carefully for some time. Poor girl, she could not keep her mind from wandering every now and then, and endeavouring to give a satisfactory explanation of William’s absence, and at last she was compelled to put down the book. She sat thinking some time longer, and almost jumped from her chair when the clock struck twelve, so still and quiet was every thing around her. “Twelve o’clock,” she said to herself, “I wonder whether he will

come home to-night ; Oh ! there's the latch ; " " Who's there," she said aloud ? " It's me, Dick Burton," said a voice in reply ; " William got me to call to say he should not be home to-night, and you'd better go to bed." " Oh Dick," cried Poor Mary, " Where is he, stop one minute pray, and tell me where he is, and what is the reason he can't come home ?" but Dick was almost out of sight before Mary had well got the door open.

She closed it again with a heavy sigh. That this very night, the christening day of their first child, that he should prefer other company to his home. Oh ! what a grief to her ; her only consolation was that Mrs. Jones was gone, and did not know. But, most likely she would know, for those things were always talked about—and William, what was he doing ? was he drunk and ashamed to come home ? This was the only conclusion she could come to. She determined to join her baby in bed, and sleep, if she could, for his sake, for, alas ! she began now to think of doing her duty, and taking care of herself, *not* for her husband's sake, but for her child's.

The next morning confirmed her fears, and though William, as usual, was again penitent, yet she was beginning to lose all confidence in his promises, and repentance.

\* \* \* Time passed on, and William's failings increased with it. His family was getting large, he had already five children, the youngest not a year old, and of course, his expenses were greater and greater daily. Mary toiled early and late to make the money go the farthest, but do all she would, it was difficult to pay her way.

In the meantime William was fast losing employment ; he was now a tipsy character, and no one would employ him though still clever, when they could get a sober workman.

His precious time was passing in fruitless repentance, and weakly broken resolutions. His temper too was changing, and he often spoke very crossly to his wife, and if she had not learned that "a soft answer turneth away wrath," and practised it, she and her husband would many times have quarrelled, and perhaps William might have been tempted to strike her in one of his rough moods.

One Friday poor Mary was bitterly reminded of her sadly changed circumstances. She had placed two shillings, all she had left of last week's wages, in a teapot, in her corner cupboard, ready for that day's use. Her bread she knew would not last over breakfast, and she must make the most of that money for the day's consumption, that it

might last until William brought home his wages on Saturday. What was her dismay, on going to the cupboard after breakfast, to find her treasure gone. Who could have taken it? She had told no one where she had hid it. She asked her eldest son John if he knew anything about it, when little Mary, the next child, said, "Oh, I know, I saw father take it last night."

Then Mary knew what was become of it, for last night William had come home tipsy, and doubtless had used her savings to make himself so. She could only say, "Well, if father took it, its all right, for all the money is his, you know;" but, how bitterly she felt it, no tongue can tell. Then the thought came, "what must she do?" Her children were not accustomed to go without even one meal in the day, and now she had nothing more to give them. "How would they bear without dinner or tea? Should she get credit at the shop? but she had made a resolution *never* to run into debt. Should she go to her old mistress and ask relief—that would be begging, and could she stoop to beg?—No, she would rather starve—but then, it was not she only that would starve, it was her dear helpless children; no, they should not starve, she knew what she would do, she would take her Sunday

shawl to the pawn-shop, and get enough upon it to last 'till William brought home his wages, and then she could redeem it before Sunday, and no one would know any thing about it."

She went slowly up stairs to fetch it, and, putting on her bonnet, called hastily to John to mind the children, then rushed out of the house with the shawl tightly folded up under her apron.

She walked very fast, feeling afraid of meeting any one she knew, for fear they should discern where she was going, and frequently casting her eyes down to see whether the apron quite covered and hid her shawl.

At last she approached the shop. A burning blush spread over her face, she was going to do what she had all her life condemned in others; besides, this was her wedding shawl, and she had hoped to have kept it all her life. But then she thought, "I shall have it back again to-morrow night," and, with a great effort, she entered the shop, first having looked up and down the street, to see that no one observed her. The distressing business was soon over, and Mary received five shillings for her shawl.

She bought food for her little ones on her way home, but when she got there, she could not decide where would be the safest place to hide the

remainder, so that it should be safe ; safe from whom ? Alas ! even from her husband. Tears were now familiar with poor Mary, and their coming excited scarcely her notice, but they flowed plentifully during these thoughts. She felt it better to say nothing to William about what had passed, for, perhaps, it would only make him angry, and thus begin the first interruption, to the hitherto perfect understanding, which had been between them.

Saturday evening brought William's wages, but they were so much smaller than usual, that it was with dismay Mary received them. "Is this all, William ?" she said, "it is much less than usual." "It's all *you'll* get," he replied in a surly voice, "so make what you can of it, and don't plague about it," and she was silent, but she felt at that moment that her shawl was gone for ever, and that strict economy alone would feed them all for the week. She now began to try washing things for her neighbours, and earned a few shillings now and then in various ways, for William's wages became every week more uncertain, and sometimes there was nothing ; all was spent in drink.

The drink too began to have a fearful effect upon his health, he was no longer the fine, stout, upright young man of former days ; but a stoop-

ing, shaking, miserable looking fellow, with a slouching carriage and unsteady look, creeping along as if ashamed to be seen. I said before, when he was courting Mary, there were no young women in the village who would not have been proud to have had him for a lover; but now, if he had been unmarried, there was not one who would have had a word to say to him, so changed was he. He scarcely ever had work, and, when he had, he often neglected it for the alehouse, if he could manage to get any piece of furniture, or clothing of his wife's or children's to get money upon. He had not yet *abused* his wife; his respect for her still remained, but when a man ceases to respect himself, he is not often long before he loses respect for others.

Mary had not long been the mother of her sixth child, when a terrible accident happened which destroyed her peace of mind for many weeks. William had been out of work for some days, and was sitting, smoking by the fire, whilst Mary nursed her baby, a little boy, and placed him in his cradle fast asleep. She then took a can to fetch some water for the tea-kettle, and to see what John was doing out of doors with his brothers and sisters. She had to go rather further to find them than she expected, and afterwards to

draw the water, and carry it home. She thought she saw a great smoke coming out of the cottage door as she returned, and quickened her pace as much as possible, to learn the cause, but she had not advanced many steps, before a violent scream caused her to drop her can from her head, and dart forward with all the speed her weak state would allow.

What a sight met her eyes when she reached the door ! The cradle in which her darling boy lay was in a blaze, whilst he uttered scream after scream, and her husband was sitting fast asleep on a stool by its side.

To snatch the babe from the flames, and wrap him in a shawl which lay near, was the work of a moment, and then she quickly laid him on a chair, and threw jug after jug of water on the blazing cradle. With some difficulty she succeeded in extinguishing the flames, and turning to the baby found him quite quiet and apparently comfortable. How much he was burnt she did not know, but she had heard that the air should be kept carefully away from a burnt person, and she dare not take the shawl off to look.

John ran for the doctor whilst she rocked the poor baby backwards and forwards singing a low song the while. She thought with great comfort

that he was baptised, and that, if he should die, she should feel quite sure he would be happy. William had awaked, and stood trembling by her side, sobered by the sad catastrophe, and not daring to speak lest he should disturb his son.

He had taken the low stool his wife had been nursing the child on before she went out, and drawn it to the crib to look at his sleeping child. His pipe was in his mouth, and he, half tipsy, whilst thinking in a “moidering” way, fell asleep with it still in there. As might be guessed, the pipe soon fell from his opening mouth, and rested on the coverlid of the little cradle. A very short time served to ignite the bed clothes, and, if most providentially, Mary had not returned when she did, the child would have been burnt to a cinder.

When the doctor arrived, he carefully examined the poor babe, which seemed to put him to great torture; then, looking at Mrs. Fairley, he said, “I fear the child is very much burnt.” “Oh!” said the poor mother, “do you think he will die, Sir? Can nothing be done for him, my poor, poor boy!” “While there’s life, there’s hope you know, Mrs. Fairley,” returned the doctor, “and there’s no knowing what care and good nursing may do, especially with children; at the

same time it would be wrong in me not to tell you the truth at once, and I much fear the fire has burned the child's chest severely, which, you know, is a bad place to be burnt ; but you must not give way, Mrs. Fairley, these thing *will* happen in large families like yours. I can tell you this, for your comfort; you did the very best thing you could for him, after the accident, by keeping the air away from the burnt parts."

After giving Mary particular directions about the management of the child, and saying he would step in again towards night, and see how he was going on, he took his leave, not deigning to speak a word to William, whose state he plainly saw, and for whom he could feel nothing but contempt.

Mr. Grant was not long in hearing of poor Mary's sorrow, and lost no time in coming to see her. His visit gave her very great comfort, and he spoke very strongly to William, shewing how terrible were the consequences of drunkenness. "Surely" said he, "Now, William, you have received warning enough from an All Merciful Father, who might have cut you off long ago in a drunken fit, but who has hitherto graciously spared you to suffer this trial, in the hope it may at last teach you sobriety. Mary will learn to bless God even for this terrible blow, if it should

prove instrumental in making you once more the man you were, with clean, healthy children, a smiling, neat wife, and a clean, comfortable cottage. You can have all these things again if you like, you know, William, for you are a clever workman, if only you will make a solemn resolution to God, *never* to enter an alehouse again, on any pretence whatever, and entreat His help, night and morning, and whenever the temptation comes, as come it will, to be able to resist. Your friends will not let you alone, when they see you striving to regain your character; they will be all the more anxious to persuade you to try just *one* glass, or even only to sit with them, or sing for them, whilst they drink; but *mark* what I say, William; as surely as ever you enter a pôthouse, so surely the devil has you for his own. If the temptation to drink is so strong outside the door, what must it be in; when your eyes behold what your soul so longs for. Oh! I pray of you, make a manly effort while you may, for who knows whether this is not the last opportunity it will please God to give you."

How often, in her after life, did poor Mary remember with trembling, that last sentence of Mr. Grant's conversation. Alas! he foresaw but the truth. William, when he got quite sober, was

filled with remorse, calling himself the murderer of his child, and the destroyer of all the happiness of his family. He hated himself, and really believed it would cure him of drinking. He determined to set about getting employment directly, and even asked Mary to meet him at the end of his day's work, and walk home with him, that he might not pass the Bush Inn alone, and if she could not come, she was to send John. He tried at night to pray God to forgive him, and help him to keep his good resolutions, but every body knows how very difficult it is for a man to pray who has neglected to do so for a long time. Poor William found it almost impossible, and went to bed in a wretched state of misery and remorse.

His wife sat up all night in the kitchen, with the baby on her knee, scarcely daring to take her eyes off his face, lest he should be dead, and she not know it; for she had been so long accustomed to Dr. Beverley, that she knew from what he had said, that there was no hope of the child's life. If Mary had not long had an Almighty Friend, to whom she had always gone, in times of trial and suffering, I do not know how she would have got through that night. It seemed *very* long to her, with no sound to occupy her mind, except the kitchen clock, slowly striking the hours, and

ticking monotonously between. Now and then a cinder fell from the fire and startled her with its suddenness, but the child lay perfectly still, only breathing rather loud, and opening and shutting his little dull eyes as if to shew he was not asleep.

At length the grey light of morning began to make itself seen through the thin window curtain, and she began to see more distinctly the little face laying so patiently on her knee, turned towards hers. It was changed, she felt sure it was. It looked drawn and *very* pale, and the breath certainly came quicker and quicker. Was he dying? Mary had never seen any one die, not even a child, and she could not tell. Ought she to do any thing, and what? She did not dare to call to William, for she *had* heard, that it was wrong to make a noise by a dying person.

As usual her help was in prayer, and whilst she was still asking help and strength for herself, and, if it pleased God, the restoration of her child, but if not, that he might die without much pain, and be taken to dwell with Him in Heaven, she felt the baby give a slight struggle, and perceived he was in a convulsion. She had seen one or two of her children in such fits, so knew what they were, but she dared not try to put him in a warm bath, as the doctor had told her to do with the

others, because of his burns. She sat then as quietly as she could, and soon, almost thankfully, saw him draw a long fluttering breath, then a shade came over his pale face, and she knew he was dead. Dead! she thought to herself, dead! —that word seemed all she could know.

She stirred not, she scarcely breathed, she felt unable even to think for some time, yet something must be done, and there was no one to do it but herself, so, in a sort of mechanical way, she gently placed the dead child in his cradle, and went to call William.

"William," she said, shaking him, "William, our dear child is gone." "Gone, gone where?" said William, still half asleep, "what is it Mary?" "Our child is dead," she said slowly and distinctly, "will you get up?" "Is he dead, Mary? Oh! and I have killed him; I did not think he he would die. Are you quite sure?" "Yes, William," she answered, "come and look at him, he looks so calm and beautiful, and so peaceful, as if all his troubles were over for ever," and, he came.

Those who look upon a dead child for the first time can scarcely understand the feeling of holy awe which the sight gives. The innocent face, the happy peaceful look, the calm expression, un-

ruffled by any evil or violent passion—even the deserted body looks angelic, and one feels almost tempted to envy so quickly perfected a happiness. Baptised and made one of Christ's little ones, it is scarcely possible to grieve much that he is gone to join His Redeemer before his white robes are spotted, and his beautiful brow put to shame.

Yet Mary did grieve much and long, though comforted with all these thoughts, and many weeks passed before her usual cheerfulness returned.

William was greatly shocked when he found they could not afford to have a grand funeral, but would be obliged to have his child buried by the parish. He said, "he never expected to come to that," and Mary had some difficulty in persuading him it was better to accept help from the parish honestly, than to run into debt dishonestly. Indeed they were so poor now, that Mary was obliged to take her three elder children from the school, as they could no longer afford to pay two-pence a week for each of them; and, had it not been for Mrs. Banks, who kindly came, and said, she would pay for them, they would have lost the most valuable time of their lives for learning, and grown up ignorant, and, very likely, wicked men and women.

You may be sure Mary most thankfully accepted Mrs. Banks's kind offer, and, though she blushed crimson, when her old Mistress told her to come to the house twice a week for any meat they might have to spare, yet she thanked her most heartily, and gratefully promised to do so. Mrs. Banks then, thought Mary, knew all about their circumstances, and though she had never said a word against her husband, since he was her husband, yet doubtless she remembered all she had said before, and now, oh ! it was all coming true. But Mrs. Banks did not know how much better William had been since little Joe's death, and she would tell her when next she came. Then she remembered, if she did, it would lead her to speak of how bad he was before, so she decided she would say nothing.

In the meantime William *was* better, for he had several times resisted a very strong desire to turn in to the Bush Inn with his fellow workmen on a Saturday night, as they walked home together ; but he was unfortunately proud and boastful of his conquests, and began to think it was all very easy, and that he should have no difficulty in becoming a steady and sober man.

Let us all remember that *no* bad habit, long indulged in, is broken through *easily*. If William

had read his Bible, he would there have learned, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall," but, instead of that, he was fast getting the feeling, that he was a fine fellow, and could do as he liked, and so he forgot to entreat help, where alone help for such as he was to be found. This feeling of security threw him off his guard, and made him an easy prey to his soul's great enemy.

His master had a job in D——, a town about four miles from Croston, and, as William Fairley was so much steadier than formerly, and far the best joiner he had in his shop, he determined to send him to do it. William was much flattered to be the one chosen, and came in great spirits to tell Mary how well he was getting on, and say he should be rather later home at nights, until the business was done. But it was summer time and Mary said, that would not signify much; for she and the children would walk to meet him, and then they could all return together to supper.

William had been working about a fortnight at D——, when he unfortunately fell in with the very friend, who had first tempted him to drink at the Croston fair. He was a good-natured, easy man,—this friend—who could take a

great many glasses of spirits and water in company, and not be much the worse, and he did not believe there was any harm in doing so. His occupation, that of a butcher, led him a good deal up and down the country, and he had acquaintance in most of the towns and villages near Croston, who were all glad to join him in a glass and a talk, in the public house.

He was not long before he asked William to come, but William said, "He must make haste home, for perhaps his wife would be walking to meet him." "Oh! nonsense," said the butcher, "never mind your wife; bless me! you see her every day, but me, an old friend, you have never clapt your eyes on since Croston fair, a good nine years agone."

"That's true Ben," replied William; "but I promised not to be late." "Well and you sha'n't be late, I'll engage," returned Ben, "but just step in for a minute, for I'm right dry, whatever you are, and I can't so much as talk without a little drop, and then I'll walk part of the way home with you, and we can have out our jaw, as we go along." "I'll wait here outside for you, Ben," said William, "for Iv'e determined not to go into a public again." "You *have*?" said Ben, bursting into a fit of loud laughter. "Well, I

never ! then have you joined the tee-totallers, Will ? I declare that's the best joke ever I heard this many a day ; how our folks *will* laugh when they hear it. But come, old fellow, don't be such a fool—at any rate, just sit down, whilst I have a drop of brandy and water this hot day, and I wo'n't so much as ask you to drink. Why I suppose some canting Methody has got hold of you, Will, and made you as soft as butter, Eh ? what's it all for ?"

William was just getting vexed and annoyed, and he thought to himself, or rather, I should think, the Devil put it into his head, "Why can't I go in, and wait for Ben, surely I can keep from drinking *now*. I'm not such a fool as to take it when I'm determined not." So he walked straight into the lion's mouth with his friend, and sat down at a small round table which stood near the window on the sandy floor of the close smelling unwholesome room. How far different from the fresh healthy air outside, yet William did not feel disgust, but rather pleasure as if some restraint had been removed from him and he was free.

There were two or three parties sitting and smoking and drinking in the room, and though Ben kept his word and never asked William to

drink, yet he did not scruple to make fun of him for not doing so, so as to attract the notice of the rest of the company. These were quite ready for a bit of fun, as they called it; and they all set upon poor William at once, calling him soft and a girl, and wife ridden, and afraid to do as he liked, and every aggravating name they could find, so that it was scarcely to be wondered at that he at last consented to take one glass.

And now I need describe no more, for what drunkard ever took *only one* glass? Alas! another and another followed, until, at last, William could scarcely keep his feet, and, in that state, he set off to walk home with his friend the butcher.

It was much later than usual, so Mary, after walking some little way with the children, and not meeting him, was obliged to return, and put the little ones to bed. She then grew unaccountably anxious about her husband; she was always in fear when he was late, but this time a more than ordinary terror seized her, and she determined to leave John in care of the sleeping children, and set out once more to meet William.

In the meantime William and Ben were making the best of their way home, and Ben had brought William to within a mile of Croston when he bid him good bye, and said he must re-

turn. The road, or rather path, for there was a short cut across the fields, led through a small wood, and close by a deep stone quarry which had long been left unworked. William went staggering on, sometimes on this side of the path, and sometimes on the other, and several times nearly fell to the ground. No wonder then, when he came to the quarry, that he was unable to balance himself properly, but with a desperate effort to keep the path, he should give a step too fatally near the edge, and fall down the frightful height to the bottom of the quarry. There he lay moaning with pain, just sensible enough to feel, but scarcely to know where he was, and what had happened to him.

Mary stepped quickly along, growing every minute more anxious, and had just passed the stone quarry, and was about to enter the wood, now dark with the dusk of evening, when she thought she heard a groan. She started, stopped, and listened with breathless attention, and heard it repeated; very faint and low it was, but it was a groan, and from a human being, she felt sure. She called aloud, "Is there any body ill? is any body here?" "Oh!" said the same voice, "Oh!"—The sound was near her, but not in the wood; she thought, "was it from the quarry?" She wished it were

not quite so dark, for her woman's nature caused her to tremble in fear of she knew not what, but she would not think of herself, she would do what she could, for she felt quite convinced there was some one near in great distress.

She looked over the edge of the quarry, and, oh! how shall I describe her terror, when she saw the form of her husband laying helpless at the bottom. How she scrambled down she never could tell, but she was not a minute in doing so, but it was only to find herself perfectly incapable of rendering him any assistance, for he did not know her, and could not speak to her, and she was utterly unable to move him. She climbed the side of the quarry again, and quickly as her trembling limbs would allow, but it was far more difficult to get up than to get down, and rushing along the path called out incessantly for "help, help."

Help was nearer than she had ventured to hope, for three young men were returning from a walk in the cool of the evening, through a field, not far off, and, hearing her cries of distress, leaped the hedges and came to her. Her tale was quickly told, and soon others gathered to the spot, and succeeded with great difficulty in raising William from the quarry, and carrying him to his cottage. There Mary had all ready for him, and the Doctor arrived almost as soon as he did.

Poor Mary ! she cherished a faint hope that his fall had been a pure accident, and then, she thought, she could bear it. Oh ! how she did hope he had been sober, and yet she did not dare to ask the Doctor. He was a long time in William's room, putting him to bed with the help of one or two of the neighbours, and examining his hurts. There appeared no bone broken, and an ignorant person might have thought William was not much the worse, but the Doctor knew there was internal injury which would most likely prove his death, and that more certainly on account of his being drunk.

He was *very* sorry for Mary, and did not know how to break the news to her. He must not however tell her of William's sin, that perhaps might be saved her, but he always considered it right to tell, when there was danger ; therefore, as gently as he could, he said how much hurt her husband was.

Mary scarcely ventured to raise her head when the Doctor entered the kitchen. She was sitting on the same low stool so often mentioned, with her elbows on her knees, and her face buried in her hands. No tears found their way from her eyes, and she felt as if she were in a terrible dream.

" Well Mary," said the Doctor, " there is no bone broken in William, and we must try what

great quiet will do for him. I can scarcely say yet how much he is hurt, but a very short time will show, and in the interval we must do all we can to keep him quiet. I am not very busy, so I will come, and sit up with him all night, and see that every thing is done that ought to be." "Oh ! Dr. Beverley, how very, very kind of you," said Mary, "it will be the greatest comfort to me to have you here, for, indeed, I have been so terrified, that I scarcely know what I am doing." "Well, Mrs. Fairley," said the good Doctor, "I'll just run to my house to tell my old housekeeper not to expect me home to-night, and be back again with you directly."

Mary gently lifted the latch of her husband's room as soon as Dr. Beverley was gone, and advanced on tiptoe to the bed.

There the strong man lay, a helpless mass, groaning faintly, but quite insensible to all that was passing around him. His hair was stroked back from his handsome forehead, and his eyes were half open with an expression of unconsciousness. His arms lay outside the bed-clothes just as the Doctor had placed them, and when Mary tremblingly touched one of them, she felt it was hot and dry with fever. She stood some time by the bed gazing upon the form she had loved so well, and thinking how very sad his end was likely

to be ; then she sank upon her knees, and poured out her sorrows to her Heavenly Father, praying earnestly, that, if His will was to take her husband from her, He would mercifully grant a return of his faculties, and grace to repent of his past sins.

She was still praying that he might be forgiven, when Dr. Beverley entered, and she rose and placed a chair for him. They neither of them spoke, but remained silently watching by the dying man's bed, occupied each with their own thoughts.

At length Dr. Beverley said, in a whisper, "Mary you had better go to bed, and get some rest ; it is no use for both of us to sit up, and you must keep your strength for nursing, for perhaps tomorrow night, I may not be able to be here." "I am not tired, Sir," said Mary, "and I would much rather stay." "Yes, Mary, I dare say you would," replied the Doctor, "but it is better you should go, if only to lie down, and you may be quite sure I will call you, if any change takes place ; you know it is not always right to do what we most like," and Mary went.

She lay down by two of her children, with her clothes on, and though she could not sleep, yet she felt rested, when Dr. Beverley knocked at the

door early in the morning, and said he was going, and that William remained just the same. "I shall call in soon after breakfast," said her kind friend, "and in the meantime do your best to keep the children quiet."

Mary rose, set things a little in order, and then, quietly leaving the house, she passed two or three cottage doors near her own, and wrapped at one not very far off, which was quickly opened by its kind and cheerful looking owner. "Elizabeth," said Mary, "William is ordered to be kept quite quiet, and I knew I might ask you to do me a good turn, so I came to know whether you can take the children for to day out of our house. I'll bring them their breakfasts, and dress them, one by one as soon as they awake, and then the cottage will be pretty quiet for him." "I'll do it with pleasure, Mary," said Elizabeth, "and I'll like to have the children, for its lonesome like, now our Betsy's away with her grandmother, and I feel, I've scarcely enough to do in the day. Send me their breakfasts and I'll make them for them, and take good care of them," and thus it was arranged, so that, when Dr. Beverley called about ten o'clock, he found Mary alone with her husband, and the house as quiet and orderly as if William had been the finest gentleman in the land.

William lay in this distressing state several days, constantly moaning, as if in great pain, but unable either to move or speak. Mary contrived to have every thing perfectly still about him, and was careful to follow every direction given by Dr. Beverley, but oh! how constantly did she fall on her knees to pray that it would please the Almighty to restore her husband's senses before his death.

Elizabeth insisted on taking the entire charge of her children during each day, and would have done so at night also, if her cottage had contained room for them. As it was, they were brought in, one by one, and put to bed, strictly charged not to speak for fear of disturbing poor father.

John too proved very useful, taking care to be in time for school himself, and bringing his brother and sister with him. Then, when school was over, he had the little ones out before the cottages, and kept them from running into their own, which they would often thoughtlessly have done if John had not been there.

Mary was almost worn out with care and anxiety, and with sitting up so many nights, for though Mrs. Jones came most kindly to enquire if William wanted anything that Mrs. Banks

could send her, and to offer to sit up a night or two herself to rest Mary, yet she could not bear to leave her husband, believing, as she did, that each night would be his last.

She had just put all the children to bed, one evening, and had taken her usual seat by her husband's side, when she perceived his eyes shut, a very unfrequent thing with him, and presently his breath began to come and go quite regularly as if he slept. She could scarcely believe her eyes and ears, so great and unexpected was her joy. Did he really sleep? then surely he must be better, or at least easier. Oh! thank God for it.

Her heart was beating so fast she could scarcely sit. How thankful she did feel. She thought she would send for Dr. Beverley, for perhaps something ought to be done on this sudden change, yet she dare scarcely leave her husband for a minute whilst she went to ask John to get up and run for him. It was not far, and the Doctor was with her before Mary expected, for he was not gone to bed when John came for him.

"Well, Mrs. Fairley," said he, as she opened the door to him, "I'm right glad to hear this good news, for sleep must do good, any way, and perhaps when William wakes, he may have his

senses, who knows." "Oh sir," exclaimed Mary, "if that should be so, how very happy it would make me. If he could only have time given him to see Mr. Grant, and pray to God to be forgiven before he dies, I could be content." "Well, we shall see, we shall see," said Dr. Beverley, "and I'll stay here, Mrs. Fairley, until he does awake." So they both sat down quietly together in the sick man's room, listening with breathless attention to every sound. William seemed to sleep more comfortably than could have been expected, but still it was plain to see he suffered pain, from the twitching of his features, and the low moans he now and then uttered.

How long he seemed to Mary to sleep. It was not much after ten o'clock when she first discovered he slept, and now the clock had just struck two. A dreadful thought darted into her mind, would he sleep himself to death? She tremblingly whispered her fears to Dr. Beverley, who shook his head, and said, "No I don't think so, he is doing very well." So she got on another hour in patient prayer and watching. Between three and four a long drawn sigh attracted both their attention, and they were instantly on their feet, carefully looking at the dying man's face. It looked more calm, but all was perfectly still. In

another minute there was a second sigh, and quickly another, and his heavy eyes slowly opened upon the face of his wife who bent over him.

Yes, he knew her, she felt he did, by that look. She could scarcely stand or keep quiet, but making a great effort, she said gently, "William are you better?" William smiled, but seemed unable to speak. Mary then took hold of his hot, rough hand, and gently pressed it, when, to her great joy, he returned the pressure, and again a smile lit up his face.

Dr. Beverley now came forward, and felt his pulse, and examined his countenance, then whispered to Mary to give him a spoonful of wine which he himself had brought, in case it should be wanted. This seemed to revive William very much, and he made an attempt to say "thank you," but could not. "He is wonderfully better" whispered the Doctor, "but I fear only for a short time, so, if you wish him to see Mr. Grant, get him to come as soon as possible. I will go home now, and you can give him a spoonful of wine every half-hour, or so, whilst I am away." "How shall I ever repay you, Doctor, for all your kindness?" exclaimed Mary. "Don't talk of it," said he, "you know I have known you too long not to be interested in what so deeply interests you," and he was gone.

The first thing in the morning, little John was dispatched to the Rectory, to beg Mr. Grant's attendance, and you may be sure the worthy Rector was not long in responding to the call. He felt deeply thankful to hear William was able to understand him, and only stayed to swallow a hasty breakfast before he set out for the cottage.

During John's absence, Mary had sat holding her husband's hand, and speaking soothingly to him every now and then. At length she said "William, would not you like to see Mr. Grant?" A distressed expression instantly came over William's face, and she almost feared she had done wrong, but she continued. "You know he would tell you what you ought to think about, and teach you how to repent of all that you have done wrong, and how to pray to God for pardon, and besides he would pray for you and with you. I know, dear William, you would find comfort if you saw him, and, besides, for my sake do, for indeed, we all need comfort."

The hand was pressing hers all this time, and she thought it must mean consent, and said so. Yes, thankful she was to believe and know it did, and impatiently did she sit, hoping Mr. Grant would not be long. He was not, and William was quite ready to receive him when he came. He entered

the cottage, saying solemnly, "Peace be upon this house ;" and then Mary quietly brought him into the sick room and left him.

What passed during his long visit Mary never knew, but she saw that William had been deeply interested, and wished to see Mr. Grant again. This was not denied him, for he lived three days after he became sensible to passing events, and saw Mr. Grant twice most days, with very great advantage and comfort to himself.

Mr. Grant too comforted his poor wife a good deal by telling her that he really believed William was truly sorry for his past sins, and had heartily prayed to be forgiven. "Oh ! Sir, do you think he is safe then ?" said Mary. "No one can pronounce that," said the Clergyman ; "God alone can see the heart, but we may be allowed to hope, and I do hope William is truly penitent. You know, for I have often told you, a death-bed repentance is always most uncertain, still, as far as I can judge, I hope William will be pardoned. I shall call, and see him to-morrow morning early, if I can, but at any rate to-morrow. So, good bye Mary, and try to keep up your spirits as well as you can, for there is no knowing what may be before you, only this we do know, that all will be ordered by an Allwise and Merciful Father, who

will not lay a heavier burden than He will enable you to bear."

Poor William was not destined to see his kind Rector again in this world, for that night saw his small remnant of life extinguished in the midst of great suffering. Dr. Beverley was with him, and did all he could to soothe his dying agonies which were very severe, and then assisted poor weeping Mary to compose his limbs, and close his eyes.

It was very sad to see youth and strength so suddenly cut down, and laid on the bed of death, and to remember that he himself had been the destroyer of his own life. How different might have been this morning's scene if he had never given himself up to drinking ! How different his wife and family ! Oh ! who shall be able to calculate the mischief and misery brought on by that dreadful sin, drunkenness !

The next day an inquest was held in poor Mary's cottage, and a verdict brought in upon her husband of "accidental death."

These fearful realities of life added greatly to poor Mary's sorrow, and, if it had not been for the great kindness of both Mr. Grant and Dr. Beverley, poor Mary would scarcely have got over them.

Dr. Beverley took all the funeral arrangements upon himself, and Mrs. Banks sent five pounds to assist in its expenses, but all was done quietly and decently, and as inexpensively as possible. Mary followed her husband to his last resting place, leading his two youngest children by the hand, and followed by John with his neat sister and brother. What a melancholy procession did they form, for Mary was still young for a widow, and her five little ones excited every one's compassion. When she returned to her lonely home, she shut herself into that room where so lately her dear husband lay, and gave way to abundance of tears accompanied with prayers for help and strength to bring up, and maintain, her five fatherless children. When she came again into the kitchen she found John had been busy setting all the chairs in their places, which had been occupied by the friends who attended the funeral, laying the dinner cloth, peeling the potatoes, and fetching a pennyworth of buttermilk from the neighbouring shop. The potatoes were boiling on the fire, and another little pan stood by them, which when Mary went to examine, John said was a secret, and begged her not to look. Poor Mary! she could not help smiling through her tears to see his anxiety that she should not guess his secret, and she felt great

comfort in seeing how much he had tried to help her. "Sit down, mother," said John, "I'll do the dinner to day, and, indeed, I could easily do it every day if I might come from school an hour earlier, and, besides, I could help to take care of Nan and Jane." "Thank you, John, you were always a good kind boy," said his mother, "but school is more important at your age than at any other, and I should not think I was doing right by you to take you away now, but if I can manage to pay for Nan, I shall like you to take her with you to school, for, though she is too young to go alone, I think, with you to take care of her, she might; and then, you know, John, I shall only have Jane at home, and she could not hinder me much in my work."

Dinner was now on the table, and the little mysterious pan having been duly taken from the fire produced a nicely boiled fresh laid egg, as white as drifted snow. "There mother," said John, "where do you think that came from? it's quite fresh for we know when the hen laid it. It's none of your bought ones, but a real, fresh country egg, a present this very morning." "I am sure I can't guess where it came from," said Mary, "but whoever sent it was very kind and thoughtful, and God will reward them as well as

you, my boy, for your kind care of the poor widow."

That word "*Widow*" made Mary's tears flow fast afresh, and it required all John's caresses, and the kisses of the others, to calm her once more. To John's great delight, she ate and enjoyed her egg extremely, indeed it was about the only thing she could have eaten, and, when the children had finished their dinner, he insisted on putting all away, with the help of his eldest sister Mary. Mrs. Fairley allowed them to do as they wished, and sat watching with grateful pride the affectionate efforts of them all to comfort and help her. God had blessed her with good and obedient children, and, if she could only do her duty by them, she might even yet find happiness. She would strive to do so, and would work as hard as her strength would permit, that they might want nothing necessary for them.

A few weeks changed Mary's grief to a calm sorrow, deep and lasting, but not vehement as at first. She had plenty of occupation, taking in washing and needlework, and attending upon her children. Her neighbours and friends were all ready to give her employment, and assist her as much as lay in their power, for Mary had always been a favourite with those who knew her,

and the respect she inspired, even amongst her poorer acquaintance, was extraordinary. No one ever ventured to speak to her reproachfully of her husband, either before or after his death, for her sake, and all paid her every attention.

Mary's life now became peaceful though hard ; her children grew up around her, and soon became able to help, and afterwards to support her. She had many blessings to be thankful for, and she felt so, and ceased not to advise, and train her children in God's holy ways, but particularly to warn them against the sin of drunkenness.

She lived to have the great happiness of seeing her sons grow up into sober, steady men, and good affectionate sons, and, even after their marriage, which came about in the usual course of events, they neither of them ceased to contribute some little a week, out of their earnings, towards the support of their much loved and excellent mother.

One daughter, Nancy, the youngest but one, remained at home, and took every care of Mary. Of the other two, one—Jane—had married, and the eldest daughter, Mary, was happily settled as housemaid with her mother's old mistress Mrs. Banks now become a very old lady.

The latter years of Mrs. Fairley's life were in-

deed blessed. Supported by her children, she passed her time in attending the daily prayers, visiting her sick or poor neighbours, comforting those less fortunate than herself, and reading her Bible, until she was summoned, as we all must be, sooner or later, to her rest.













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